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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 JEDDAH 000332

SIPDIS

CENTCOM FOR GENERAL PETRAEUS FROM AMBASSADOR ERDMAN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/04/2019
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [ASEC](#) [SA](#)
SUBJECT: CHARGE'S SEPTEMBER 2ND MEETING WITH SAUDI PRINCE
MOHAMMED BIN NAIF

REF: A. RIYADH 1151
[B](#). RIYADH 1126
[C](#). RIYADH 1121
[D](#). RIYADH 1110

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Classified By: Classified by CDA Ambassador Richard Erdman for reasons
1.4(b) and (d)

SUMMARY

[1](#). (SBU) Charge (Ambassador Erdman) met with Saudi Assistant Interior Minister Mohammed bin Naif (MbN) for nearly an hour September 2 at the prince's sprawling, palatial estate in the northern outskirts of Jeddah to convey U.S. best wishes in the wake of the unsuccessful August 28 attempt on his life. The meeting featured discussion on the implications of the attack, recent developments in Yemen (septel), and the finalization of the amendment correcting the translation of the OPM-MOI agreement, which MbN and Charge signed. End summary.

APPRECIATION FOR U.S. CONCERN

[2](#). (C) Charge, accompanied by BPM chief, said he wanted to convey in person U.S.G. condemnation of the August 28 attack as well as best wishes and relief that the prince had been miraculously spared serious injury. While MbN may already have heard of or seen the September 1 White House statement expressing the President's concern, Charge said he wanted to share the official text as well as personal messages from DHS Secretary Napolitano and Counterterrorism Director Benjamin. MbN was quite a popular guy and had many friends in the U.S. government, Charge noted, since these messages were in addition to those received from Under Secretary Burns, General Petraeus, Treasury Secretary Geithner, and others. MbN said he deeply appreciated the concern and friendship shown to him, noting he had just finished speaking by phone to Treasury Secretary Geithner but unfortunately kept missing calls made by General Petraeus -- "my favorite general."

"GOD WAS PROTECTING ME."

[3](#). (C) MbN then described the attack along lines reported elsewhere and showed a number of photographs taken shortly after the attack, many of them quite gruesome. "It was a miracle I survived," he said reflectively, as he looked at the blood- and flesh-splattered walls, as if reliving the moment. Pointing to the one clean area of the wall -- a halo of white surrounded by blood stains -- he said, "God was

clearly protecting me." It was a sign that he had been doing the right thing and was more than ever resolved to continue his efforts against terrorism and violent extremism, combining tough measures against dangerous, unrepentant terrorists ("we shoot to kill") along with understanding and compassion for those who have been misguided, recognize the error of their ways and want to surrender. The decision to publicize the attack -- including the grim pictures, his condolence call to the family of the attacker, his cell phone conversation with the attacker's cohorts in Yemen just moments before the explosion, in which he was expressing concern about their bringing women and children safely back to the Kingdom -- would make clear to the public who was being true to the tenets of Islam and who was the real enemy of Islam.

ATTACK HAS INCREASED SUPPORT AND CREDIBILITY

14. (C) Charge said MbN had shown great courage and generosity of spirit in reaching out to the family of the attacker and expressing concern for the safe return of their families, even as the explosive device was about to be detonated. Perhaps some good would come from this cowardly attack, and many religious-minded Saudis would see his miraculous escape from serious injury as a sign of God's protection and blessing for their efforts to eliminate violent extremism and terrorism. Yes, MbN said, we have to "dry up" extremism. Asked whether he had some residual trauma or had difficulty sleeping after this close and grisly brush with death, he said he was sleeping well, feeling energized because the attack had shown he was on the right path, and convinced that he now had more credibility than ever with his men. Having been at risk himself, he could more easily ask them to undertake difficult and dangerous assignments where they

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could be at risk. In parting -- a few minutes before 2 a.m. -- Charge pledged continued cooperation against terrorism and extremism and once more conveyed best wishes to MbN from his many friends in the U.S. The prince again expressed deep gratitude and determination to continue the Kingdom's efforts undeterred.

15. (U) Ambassador Erdman has cleared this message.
QUINN